



Inside RAP



Bhutanese Selection Trip October 2010

*Written by Jeremy Enns, Senior Advisor, Operational Management and
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This October, I travelled to Singapore on a temporary duty assignment to assist visa officers from our High Commissions in Singapore and New Delhi with the selection of approximately 1,500 Bhutanese refugees for resettlement to Canada.

This was the third time that Canadian visa officers have travelled to Nepal to process Bhutanese refugees. By the end of 2010, roughly 2,500 Bhutanese had already been resettled to Canada, marking the half way point of the Government of Canada's commitment to resettle 5,000 Bhutanese refugees from Nepal by 2012. 1,500 arrivals are anticipated for 2011 to RAP centres right across the country, including various locations in Quebec.

In all, the temporary duty assignment was of three weeks' duration – one week in Singapore paper screening files, then a trip to Nepal, which included five days interviewing Bhutanese refugee families in Damak, as well as visits to the Goldhap refugee camp and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) transit facility in Kathmandu. Finally, the last week was spent back in Singapore to enter interview notes into the database and make selection decisions.

The selection trip to Nepal took place from October 25-29, 2010. In Kathmandu, three visa officers from Canada's High Commission in Singapore, an Ottawa-based Canada Border Services Agency employee, and me were joined by three visa officers and a refugee program assistant from the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi. From there, we took a one hour flight aboard Buddha Air to the eastern city of Bhadrapur, near the border with India. From Bhadrapur, it was roughly a one hour drive on a route that took us over the bone-dry beds of rivers that only weeks earlier had caused massive flooding. Our destination was Damak, an eastern city that is situated in close proximity to the seven refugee camps where the Bhutanese have been living for almost two decades.

In Damak, we were accommodated at an impressive facility run by the IOM (*pictured right*). The secure compound included not only a guesthouse and restaurant, but also a building with interview space, a large waiting area for the refugees, a hospital, a TB quarantine unit, and parking space for IOM and UN vehicles.

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RAP is a federally funded program that provides financial and integration assistance to newly arrived government-assisted refugees. This program has enabled the successful resettlement of thousands of refugees to Canada.

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What's New?

➤ New Interim Federal Health (IFH) Administrator

Medavie Blue Cross officially began administration of the IFH Program on January 17, 2011. For more information, visit the Medavie website at <https://provider.medavie.bluecross.ca> or call the Medavie Customer Information Centre at 1-888-614-1880.

➤ Refugee Mental Health Resource

Refugee Health: Promising Practices and Partnership Resources is the final product of a pan-Canadian study on existing and promising practices in refugee mental health conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto from January 2009 to June 2010. This product is intended as a resource for settlement workers to enable them to better support their refugee clients' mental health needs. For more information, visit the exchange portal of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Toronto at camh.net, as well as Settlement.Org.





Bhutanese Selection Trip

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Early each morning during the week of interviews, IOM bus drivers would depart to the various refugee camps (the farthest being close to a two hour drive away) to pick up the refugees who were scheduled for their Canadian immigration interviews that day. Due to security concerns, all the refugees had to be returned to their camps by dark, which imposed very real deadlines on the visa officers every day.

Thanks to the excellent coordination between IOM, UNHCR, and the Singapore visa office, the week of interviews went very smoothly. The schedule was planned in such a way that the first day of interviews was dedicated to those families who had indicated Quebec as their preferred destination or had family members already resettled to Quebec. By doing this, Singapore was able to play a larger role in assisting Quebec to meet its 2010 Government-Assisted Refugee target.

As a part of the Bhutanese group processing exercise, Canada is accepting UNHCR's refugee status determination of the Bhutanese on a *prima facie* basis, meaning a specific group of refugees are deemed to have the same "refugee story", which allowed interviews to focus on family composition, admissibility issues, and counselling rather than on refugee eligibility. This approach also allows CIC to process a high volume of refugees for resettlement in a limited amount of time. As on previous selection trips, visa officers found very little indication of security and criminality concerns and the vast majority of the caseload received a positive selection decision.

The Bhutanese refugees in Nepal have formed tightly-knit and well-organized community structures and have placed a high value on education. They also showed a high awareness about health issues and an openness to discussing them. Overall, the refugees are very resourceful, self-starters who take initiative and want to live independently. The Bhutanese we saw were, by and large, either in school, minding children at home, or working and volunteering.

While English language skills continue to be prevalent among this group, visa officers did observe that the quality of English and levels of education were generally lower than previous years. There are at least two reasons for this. First, for the initial selection missions, CIC had requested that UNHCR refer a higher number of refugees with strong English skills so that they would be able to act as interpreters for subsequent arrivals in Canada. Second, UNHCR related to us how over time they have improved their communications regarding what resettlement is, the process it entails, and how to access it, whereas in the early days, it tended to be the best and brightest rather than the more disadvantaged families who understood what was being offered by resettlement and how to take up the opportunity.



Parking lot for IOM and UN vehicles at the IOM facility in Damak, Nepal



Common area / dining hall at the IOM transit facility in Kathmandu, Nepal

During resettlement interviews and also at an information session with the refugees at the Goldhap refugee camp, the Bhutanese expressed a certain level of anxiety about their future in Canada, specifically regarding their ability to succeed here. Some of the more outrageous rumours seem to have now been dispelled (e.g. that the cold Canadian weather would make the Bhutanese unable to have children or that resettlement countries were recruiting the Bhutanese to fight in Iraq). But their determination, resourcefulness, and independence are all characteristics that will aid them greatly in Canada and I have little doubt that as a group they will thrive here, especially the children.

While in Nepal, one of the stories that made the greatest impression on me is how when the refugees left Bhutan in 1991-92 they first settled spontaneously on the banks of one of the region's rivers and two years passed before UNHCR made first contact with them. By this time and without outside influence, this community of circumstance had already established schools for its young. One gets the sense that despite their refugee flight and almost 20 years in exile, the Bhutanese have never ceded control over their own destiny. And now, tens of thousands are getting a second chance in Canada and elsewhere.



RAP Officer Reflections: Delivering RAP Across Canada

Kazenga Nyamaswa and Kristi Plastino are two RAP Officers working in the local CIC Ottawa office. Both have experience delivering RAP in two different cities and regions – Kazenga in Winnipeg & Ottawa and Kristi in Lethbridge & Ottawa. Kazenga and Kristi have agreed to share their unique experience with us.

The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) has become one of those voices that no matter where I decide to go, it's there talking to me. While in school, since 1995, I volunteered with the Language bank of the International Centre of Winnipeg MB as a translator for newcomers. What the language bank team of volunteers did was not called RAP, but we sure did a lot of work similar to RAP.



*Kazenga Nyamaswa,
RAP Officer,
CIC Ottawa*

After joining CIC Winnipeg in 2004, I spent some time in Immigration working the front desk as an Immigration Counsellor Assistant (ICA) but soon after, I started an assignment as a RAP officer. It was fun and exciting to continue what I previously started as a volunteer. This time, however, it was all sweet, there was a salary, a cubicle and a port stamp...I was a government employee in Winnipeg.

The following are my observations along the way and my opinion regarding best practices in this line of business.

I have been an "on and off" RAP Officer since September 2004. My assignment was completed in 2006 and I went back to my substantive position in Immigration (called Admissions in Winnipeg). After spending quite a long time in Winnipeg, I had to make a career move and decided to apply for opportunities in the National Capital Region. Out of all emails and applications I sent, I got an offer for a deployment to CIC Ottawa as a RAP Officer starting April 2010.

Between Winnipeg and Ottawa, the common denominator in RAP is our clients; they are very diverse and yet similar in many striking ways. They come from far apart but have gone through the same process to become permanent residents. They share the first point of contact in Canada, a temporary accommodation facility where strangers become friends and, in some cases, family. It was interesting to see and hear similar stories in Ottawa about strong bonds of relationship that started in the temporary accommodation; new circles of friends partnering to assist each other. That's resettlement beyond files, NATs, FOSS, CAIPS, DBAs, SPOs and Officers.

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I started with the RAP program in 2006 in Lethbridge, Alberta, after being offered a position out of a national post-secondary recruitment process. Accepting a job in a province which I had never even visited was definitely an adventure! We can easily take for granted knowing about our provincial social and welfare services growing up in that province, but since I had moved, I needed to quickly learn all about a new province's services, and it was easy to understand how overwhelming 'the system' can be for a newcomer!



*Kristi Plastino,
RAP Officer,
CIC Ottawa*

Being from Ontario, I have since deployed back to Ottawa where I currently reside. Although the administrative approaches differ between the two centres, the qualities of an officer remain the same. Being able to balance precious client service with the many pressures of administering the RAP program can be very challenging, and sometimes priorities get shifted really fast throughout your day. Networking and developing contacts in the community certainly improves the quality of the program and the office's capacity to respond effectively to emergency situations.

Previous experience from a city where services are streamlined from one referral to the next has shown fewer clients falling off the radar of settlement services. Also, this supports the perspective that the client is the responsibility of the community as a whole and not just one agency. In Ottawa, the practice is similar, except on a much larger scale and with many more partners involved. Because of this, there can be a sense of the "right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing," which only highlights the need for more networking between the RAP agency and their staff and the other settlement agencies. After all, the client is eventually everyone's.

Speaking of community, one of the highlights was running into a teenage boy months after his initial orientation. We had a conversation in English about school and friends and he was happy and fitting in well. Sometimes the only time we, as RAP officers, see a client is in their initial orientation, when they are fatigued from the trip, stressed and overwhelmed. Running into that boy was a good reminder that the person we meet is not necessarily who they always were, or who they will be, in time.

Kristi Plastino



RAP Officer Reflections: Delivering RAP Across Canada

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Regarding service delivery, RAP is delivered the same way in Winnipeg and Ottawa. The local office receives NATs, creates files, schedules start-up interviews and spends the rest of the year responding to a variety of client's issues, as well as adjusting their files to changing realities such as: births, divorces, employment, death etc.

In both cities, RAP is part of the Settlement Unit but its position within the unit is very different. In Manitoba, most other Settlement programs are taken care of by the province, so RAP became the major focus in Settlement; the unit had at least two officers and two support staff dedicated to RAP work. The Settlement Unit in Ottawa had a different setting; many other lines of settlement business existed, such as the former LINC, ISAP, and HOST, with sub-groups ELT, LIPs, PBLA, for instance. Private Sponsorship was part of the Immigration Unit rather than the Settlement Unit. Settlement had seven officers who spoke mostly the Contribution Agreement language and a shared support staff. In addition to the team, there was "the RAP guy" who spoke that RAP language with different acronyms such as GARS, CR1, IFH, DBAs, DSS, transfer-in/out and many more of those "not too familiar" goodies. It's amazing how the line of business you work in creates a handy unique work language.

Winnipeg and Ottawa create their files differently. In Winnipeg a file is created using "File Creation (FC)" in FOSS and all "Related Secondary (RS)" are added so the entire family composition is captured under one file. In Ottawa, FOSS is not used in the file creation process; instead, all hard copies from NAT to budgets are printed as well as a label to identify the file which is mostly under the Head of the Family (HOF). The difficulty in the Ottawa case becomes searching for RS for various reasons in the future. Considering the number of times officers and support staff revisit client's files due to separation, birth and employment, it was surprising how FOSS-based file creation is not a common practice.

In the case of CIC Ottawa, it was also surprising to realize how RAP was overshadowed by other programs within Settlement even though it had quite a large number of arrivals.

My previous RAP experience has been a benefit to me in my current job. From file creation to income calculation and interviews, it was all familiar. Some

procedures are typical to each centre but the overall program delivery is based on CIC's IP3 manual. FOSS and CAIPS program were also familiar which increased the comfort level.

There are definitely plenty of practices that will make RAP work enjoyable; in my case however, I can focus on three:

➤ **Great rapport with the SPO-** Having worked with various Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) in both cities, it became obvious how a good working relationship with the SPO makes our work much easier and enjoyable. The level of cooperation between a RAP officer and Settlement counsellors will benefit all involved parties, officers, counsellors and mostly clients.

➤ **Open communication-** The approach of monthly scheduled meetings with the SPO to clarify expectations, identify issues/concerns and share best practices seemed very positive and welcomed by the SPO. This approach created a positive work atmosphere for both parties and greater cooperation.

➤ **Consistency-** While at the SPO's office for start-up interviews, avoid accepting small notes requesting assistance or minor services such as address change, IFH with errors to be corrected, lost cheques etc; they can easily be lost. Always ask for a quick reminder email, the change of status form or a full client report depending on the nature of the request. If any favours (change interview date, time etc.) are done to one counsellor, be prepared to do it to all when and if requested.

In terms of qualities an officer should possess to do the RAP Officer job, I think an officer should have empathy and compassion, be a good listener but objective; go the extra mile in assisting clients without taking ownership of their problems. In my case, a "Mantra" that I use is a question, whenever a client is explaining an issue or a personal situation that invites me to act; I keep repeating to myself "what does IP3 say?" before I take any action. This trick has allowed me to assist clients and move on after listening to horror stories.

However, in addition to the above, a RAP officer has to love people, be interested in their diversity and be open enough to value their perspective on life.

Kazenga Nyamaswa



Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA) Observation Visits – Nepal, Kenya, Syria

CIC recently provided funding and support for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to arrange observation visits for Canadian resettlement service provider organizations (SPOs) to visit Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA) sites that provide pre-departure orientation to government-assisted refugees (GARs) and privately-sponsored refugees (PSRs). The purpose of the visits was to enhance the knowledge and links between service providers and COA staff through on-site observation of COA sessions and IOM processing, exchanges of information on overseas and in-Canada orientation programming, and mutual sharing of advice and concerns.

The IOM invited the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP) and all CIC-funded Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) service providers across Canada to apply to send staff on these visits. The IOM selected sites in Kenya, Nepal and Syria for observation on the basis of their high volume of cases being processed, the frequency and regularity of COA sessions, perceptions they would be very interesting to the SPOs, the related services/functions IOM provides to Canada in these sites, and their populations or caseloads which include both urban and camp-based refugees, GARs and PSRs.

There was great interest to participate in these visits with the IOM receiving many applications. A total of 15 SPO staff were selected, five for each site. These staff were generally in supervisory positions: program coordinators, assistant managers, managers, and one executive director. Participants were selected from large and small SPOs across eight provinces to ensure representation of a wide range of experiences and perspectives.

The site visits occurred in March 2010. The length of visits varied based on intended activities: eleven days were scheduled in Nepal, nine days in Kenya, and five and a half days in Syria. In each site SPO staff took part in an orientation session, attended meetings with various IOM departments involved in Canadian resettlement activities and, where available, met with UNHCR and Canadian mission staff abroad. The COA sessions were in the refugee camps in both Nepal and Kenya. Syria has only urban refugee cases. The visits



COA group in Nepal

proceeded with only minor changes to plans and in the end both the IOM and SPO staff reported a high level of satisfaction with the opportunities afforded to them.

The IOM appreciated the opportunity to open lines of communication that will facilitate future information-sharing and collaboration. The visits afforded opportunities for increased understanding of the range of services offered and the challenges encountered in helping refugees both overseas and domestically. The IOM learned about additional resources developed and used by SPOs in Canada and it received valuable inputs from SPOs on the content and wording of the COA's presentation on Canada's Resettlement Programs.

The site visits helped SPO staff to develop more in-depth knowledge of the various overseas resettlement partners and their functions (i.e. Canadian visa posts, UNHCR, and other international NGOs). The resettlement SPOs that participated invited IOM representatives to attend SPO gatherings in Canada to further the connections and information-sharing. In summarizing the value of the visits, one of the SPO staff commented,

"For many years, there has been a major disconnect in information concerning how GARS are processed overseas, what information is told to them, and what their expectations are when they arrive in Canada....Being given this opportunity to finally understand the challenges faced by IOM, UNHCR and Canadian Embassy officials in Damascus, highlighted key issues for us."



Matching Centre Information

Matching Centre is part of the Refugee Resettlement Program Delivery Unit, part of CIC's Integration Program Management Branch at NHQ in Ottawa. Matching Centre's primary roles are to determine final destinations for GARs and to ensure that critical information (e.g., refugee needs, arrival itineraries, etc.) are provided to CIC's in-Canada delivery network to ensure an efficient and nationally coordinated refugee resettlement movement.

Matching Centre does NOT:

- Process case applications (i.e., approving or refusing), similar to what is done by a Case Processing Centre, a local CIC or a visa office overseas. Matching Centre's activities relate directly to the national coordination of the refugee resettlement program. Under the refugee resettlement program, visa officers are responsible for case decisions and local CICs are responsible for approving sponsorship undertakings under PSR (to determine sponsor eligibility and adequacy of settlement arrangements).
- Make travel arrangements and arrange travel dates for refugees – it is usually the IOM that makes travel arrangements for GARs and PSRs, and in some cases the refugees themselves or sponsoring groups may assume this role.
- Control most aspects of GAR arrival patterns – Matching Centre tracks arrivals by city in Canada and will work with IOM and missions as required to try and manage the flow of arrivals. However, due to the nature of Canada's global resettlement program and the numerous variables that exist (e.g., country conditions, availability of airline seats, expiring medical exam validity, etc.) there are limitations on how much MC can influence arrival patterns.
- Have all information related to client needs before arrival. The information provided to the in-Canada support delivery network is obtained from information received from visa offices and CAIPS notes which, in turn, is largely based on the client interviews overseas whose primary intent is to determine eligibility and not to collect settlement needs information. Matching Centre does its utmost to relay whatever relevant information it has to local CICs, RAP SPOs and sponsoring groups wherever possible.

To contact the Matching Centre, email :
Matching-Centre@cic.gc.ca

RAP Newsletter Survey Results

Thank you to everyone who completed the *Inside RAP* electronic survey, conducted from October 20th to November 12th, 2010. The purpose was to determine if *Inside RAP* was reaching its target audience and if the content was relevant and useful. The survey was distributed to approximately 50 CIC employees and 100 SPO employees delivering RAP across the country.

Highlight of Results:

Of the 63 respondents (41 SPO/22 CIC), the majority read some or all of the newsletter (86%), find it somewhat to very interesting (97%), share it with other RAP colleagues (96%), while 30% share with non-RAP colleagues, prefer distribution via electronic link (60%), while 29% prefer print copy in mail.

Respondents suggested:

- Recipients include local supervisors/ managers, PSR counselors, provincial welfare agents, settlement agencies,
- Church ministers, schools, etc.
- Content include articles on overseas and how RAP relates to international objective, what's new section, best practices from other centers, more info on SPO work, refugee success stories, etc.

Next Steps: Many suggestions will be incorporated into future issues. The format will change from hard copy to electronic only. Recipients will remain the same (CIC and RAP SPO employees) since they are the target group, with the addition of health clinics that serve GARs and the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP).

Inside RAP is produced twice per year by CIC's Refugee Resettlement Program Delivery Unit, Integration Program Management Branch, NHQ. Creating the newsletter was a recommendation from the 2007 National RAP Conference and its purpose is to share RAP related information with CIC and SPO staff across Canada who deliver the program.



**Stay tuned for the next issue of Inside RAP.
Feel free to contact us, we appreciate your feedback and suggestions!
rap.newsletter@cic.gc.ca**